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ACTION AF-01

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FM AMEMBASSY KIGALI
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C O N F I D E N T I A L

FOR AF/C AISTON FROM AMBASSADOR

E.O. 12356: N/A
TAGS: AMGT
SUBJECT: OFFICIAL-INFORMAL: SEASON'S GREETINGS

1. BACK LAST AUGUST I LOOKED AHEAD AT THE CALENDAR AND DECIDED TO TAKE LEAVE IN NOVEMBER SO THAT I COULD BE HERE WITH THE TROOPS OVER THE HOLIDAYS; MY INTUITION PREDICTED THAT HOLIDAYS IN RWANDA WOULD OFFER SOME SPECIAL OPPORTUNITIES.

2. INTUITION WAS RIGHT; IT HAS BEEN A GOOD TIME TO BE HERE. WE STARTED WITH CHRISTMAS CAROLING AMONG THE MISSIONARY COMMUNITY, AND A FEW DAY LATER TOOK UP A READING OF DICKEN'S CHRISTMAS CAROL ACCCOMPANIED BY

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HANGING OF THE GREENS AND BUNDLES OF SWEETS WHICH CASEY AND SANDY WORKED UP FOR THE LARGER EXPAT COMMUNITY. CHRISTMAS DINNER WAS ON OUR PORCH FOR ALL WHO REMAINED AT POST ALONG WITH OTHER FRIENDS AND VISITORS. IPO (KELLY) PREPARED THE TURKEY; DAO (TOM AND MICKEY) LOVINGLY WATCHED OVER IT. THE BIRD TOOK AN HOUR LONGER THAN EXPECTED TO BROWN, BUT NOBODY SEEMED TO MIND AS WE SIPPED MULLED WINE AND SANG CAROLS AROUND THE KEYBOARD THAT A/FBO FINALLY LET US PURCHASE.

3. OUR FSN'S TOOK TWO DIFFERENT TACKS TO THE SEASON. AT THE EMBASSY AND USIS, THEY WANTED TO ACCLAIM LIFE ANEW. USAID'S FSN'S FELT CELEBRATION WAS INAPPROPRIATE IN THE CIRCUMSTANCES. WE ACCOMMODATED BOTH PERSPECTIVES. EMBASSY/USIS FSN'S DECORATED AN ARTIFICIAL TREE THAT OUR MUSLIM HEADMAN FOUND IN THE RECESSES OF THE STOREHOUSE, ORGANIZED JOYOUS GAMES AT OUR RESIDENCE, AND FEASTED AROUND A TABLE LADEN WITH GOODIES THAT AMERICAN STAFF PROVIDED. THE NEXT DAY I WENT TO MEET WITH AID EMPLOYEES TO EXPRESS MY APPRECIATION AND UNDERSTANDING OF THEIR POSITION AND TO DISCUSS SOME OF THE CHALLENGES WHICH FACE US IN THE YEAR AHEAD. BOTH INSTANCES OFFERED THE CHANCE TO TIGHTEN BONDS WITHIN OUR EMBASSY TEAM.

4. THE GOVERNMENT CELEBRATED THE SEASON, EVEN GAVE THE DAY AFTER NEW YEAR'S OFF, BUT KEPT ITS TONE DUTIFUL AND RESTRAINED (NOTE FBIS COVERAGE OF BIZIMUNGU'S RADIO ADDRESSES, EXPANDING ON BRIEF REMARKS HE GAVE THE DIP CORPS ON DECEMBER 30). THE CEREMONIAL OCCASIONS EMPHASIZED THE ANGUISH OF CHILDREN AND THE EFFORTS OF LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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GOVERNMENT TO HELP THEM. ILLUSTRATING ONE DIMENSION OF THE PROBLEM WAS THE CHRISTMAS SERMON AT THE ANGLICAN CHURCH AND THE FRONT PAGE CARTOON OF "LIBERATION" BOTH HIGHLIGHTING THE PROBLEM OF RAPED WOMEN, PREGNANT WITH THE CHILDREN OF THEIR ATTACKERS. THERE IS A NINE-MONTH TIME-BOMB SOON TO EXPLODE ON THIS ALREADY TRAUMATIZED SOCIETY.

5. AS THE CHRISTMAS SEASON OPENED, MADAME LA

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PRESIDENTE, SURROUNDED BY ALL OF KIGALI'S CURRENT ELITE, HOSTED SKITS, DANCES AND TRADITIONAL SONGS ALL POINTING TO PLIGHT OF RWANDA'S ORPHANS. SHE THEN ANNOUNCED HER PERSONAL GIFT TO A RWANDAN NGO FOR ORPHANS AND ENCOURAGED US, IN EFFECT, TO "GO AND DO LIKEWISE."

5. ON CHRISTMAS DAY, THE GOVERNMENT PURPOSELY DECENTRALIZED ITS CELEBRATION, ASKING EACH PREFECTURE TO CLOSE OUT THE "YEAR OF THE FAMILY" WITH WHATEVER LOCAL TALENT THEY COULD DIG UP. IN KIGALI'S CASE, STADIUM CEREMONIES INCLUDED PREACHING AND CHORAL SINGING IN AN INTERFAITH WORSHIP SERVICE, THEN BOY SCOUT SKITS ON TURNING STREET THUGS INTO USEFUL CITIZENS, BATWA DANCING, SPEECHES AND GIFT GIVING TO ORPHANS (TOYS CASEY FOUND IN KAMPALA WERE PART OF SANTA'S KIT). AFTER SITTING AT THE STADIUM FROM 10 AM TO 1 PM TAKING THIS ALL IN, I EXCUSED MYSELF TO GO HOME AND PEEL POTATOES. WE HAD LET THE STAFF HAVE THE DAY OFF, WERE EXPECTING TWENTY-SOME DINNER GUESTS, AND I HAD PROMISED SANDY A HELPING HAND.

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6. ON NEW YEAR'S EVE, AFTER THE PRESIDENT AND CABINET HAD HOSTED THE DIPLOMATIC CORPS THE EVENING BEFORE, EACH MINISTER TRUNDLED OFF TO AN ORPHANAGE IN KIGALI OR UP COUNTRY WHERE THEY SHARED THE NEW YEAR WITH THE CHILDREN. SANDY AND I FOLLOWED SUITE, FOR THERE ARE ABOUT 150 ORPHANS AT KIBOGORA BEING CARED FOR BY CONCERNED LOCAL FOLKS AND SUPPLIED BY WORLD RELIEF AND OTHER NGO'S. NOTHING MAKES YOU WANT INTENSELY TO HELP THIS LAND, OR DESPAIR MORE OF DOING SO, THAN TO WALK WITH THESE KIDS, TRYING TO HOLD ALL THE LITTLE HANDS THRUST UP AT YOU, AND KNOW THAT THERE IS NO WAY, WITH PROGRAMS, FUNDING OR EVEN PHYSICAL PRESENCE, WE CAN FILL THE VOID IN THEIR YOUNG LIVES.

7. ALL THIS TOOK PLACE IN AN ATMOSPHERE OF REMARKABLE CALM, WITH EVER-DIMINISHING PUBLIC EVIDENCE OF THE RPA SECURITY BLANKET. IN SPITE OF "OPERATION RETOUR" AND

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SECURITY THREATS ALONG LAKE KIVU, WE WENT THROUGH ONLY THREE (CASUAL) RPA CHECK POINTS ON OUR FIVE-HOUR TRIP TO CYANGUGU PREFECTURE. SMALL ATTACKS ALONG THE EASTERN FRONTIER AND POSSIBLE INCURSIONS FROM ACROSS THE LAKE REMIND US THAT THERE ARE SOME RWANDANS STILL ANXIOUS TO FIGHT THEIR WAY HOME. THE THREAT THAT THE EXTERNAL FORCES WOULD LAUNCH SOMETHING SIGNIFICANT BEFORE THE END OF THE YEAR HAS, HOWEVER, PROVED TO BE HOLLOW BLUSTER. DART REPORTS THAT REPATRIATION FROM GOMA CAMPS IS PICKING UP. YET, UNREO, JUST BACK FROM
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BUKAVU THE BORDER TELLS ME THAT POLITICAL CONTROL OF CAMPS AND THE DETERMINATION TO USE THOSE CAMP POPULATIONS AS PART OF A POLITICAL SETTLEMENT IS JUST AS INTENSE AS EVER.

8. CHRISTMAS IN RWANDA SEEMED TO HEIGHTEN THE GOVERNMENT INTENTIONS TO DO GOOD. ONE WONDERS WHAT CHRISTMAS WAS LIKE ACROSS THE BORDERS IN NGARA AND GOMA. "PEACE" IS PERPETUALLY THE HOPE OF THIS SEASON; UNFORTUNATELY "AMONG MEN OF GOOD WILL' IS ALSO PART OF THE TRADITIONAL FORMULATION.

9. MY SEASON'S WISH FOR YOU THAT YOU HAVE MORE TIME WITH YOUR FAMILY IN THE NEW YEAR. IN SHORT, READ THE ABOVE AT YOUR LEISURE. REGARDS. RAWSON

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